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Congress and the B-2: A Triumph of Politics

"It is a law of governance that democracies have to spend themselves dizzy. Citizens of democracies can, after all, tell their government to give them things. For this reason, defense spending in America is not so much a matter of Americans sacrificing to keep their country safe as it is a matter of Americans telling their government to give them defense contracts and defense-industry jobs."

P. J. O'Rourke ¹

"When you spend money for defense, you get two things, a good defense if you handle your money right and secondly you get people jobs. That's the name of the game out here, keeping people working."

Congressman Sonny Montgomery ²

"For 321 of the 435 congressional districts, the military budget takes more out of them in taxes than it returns to them as military contracts and salaries."

Employment Research Associates ³

Introduction

There are many opinions regarding defense spending and its purposes, for example, the three related but different views shown above. The first observation I would make regarding them is that satire is humor mixed with truth; P.J. O'Rourke is both a successful satirist and much funnier than the economists at Employment Research Associates, non-profit or not. Mr. Montgomery (D, Mississippi) sits on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC). That makes his opinion relevant; it also means that his district is one of 114 enjoying a "surplus." Lastly, the opinions of the economists aren't very funny; but they do reflect the success some Members of Congress enjoy in directing defense money to home districts.

The annual Department of Defense (DoD) Authorization Bill involves more issues than simply the defense of our country. Among them are politics and adjusting DoD's priorities to reflect the interests of individual members and districts. "Where" defense money is spent is often as important as on "What" we spend it. The Congressional decision to tightly constrain production of the B-2 in the Fiscal Year 1992 (FY 92) DoD Authorization Bill stems from domestic political concerns as much as from national security considerations. The tortuous path to that decision offers an illustration of Congress at work in the politics of defense.

Defense policy is not "made" in the traditional sense of a unitary actor deciding what's best for the country based on the issues and their merits. Policy flows from the competition between actors, each with its own views of what's "right;" each striving to maximize its own value function. In this brief essay, I'll use the three organizational

¹ P.J. O'Rourke, *Parliament of Whores*, (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991) 175.

² R. W. Apple, Jr., "Battle Cry in Congress," *The New York Times*, 1 Oct 91: 10.

³ Colman McCarthy, "The B-2, a Working Man's Rip-Off," *The Washington Post*, 6 Aug 91: 4.

decisionmaking models developed by Allison--Model I: The Rational Actor, Model II: The Organizational Process, and Model III: Bureaucratic Politics--as a framework to discuss the process. As Allison suggests, we might ...

Imagine a chess game in which the observer could see only a screen upon which moves in the game were projected, with no information about how the pieces came to be moved. Initially, most observers would assume--as Model I does--that an individual player was moving the pieces with reference to plans and tactics toward the goal of winning the game. But a pattern of moves can be imagined that would lead some observers, after watching several games, to consider a model II assumption: the chess player might not be a single individual but rather a loose alliance of semi-independent organizations, each of which moved its set of pieces according to standard operating procedures. ... It is conceivable, furthermore, that the pattern of play might suggest to an observer a Model III assumption: a number of distinct players, with distinct objectives but shared power over the pieces, could be determining the moves as the resultant of collegial bargaining.⁴

The B-2--the central piece in this essay's game of chess--may well end up as the first major defense program to be terminated after production had begun. Congress, which does not have a reputation as a "Terminator" of defense programs, reached a semi-decision in the 1991 chapter in the long and agonizing debate over the stealthy bomber. How did we get to this point? With half the money for the total program spent and only fifteen bombers authorized?

In 1977, the Carter Administration faced a fundamental decision--what should they do about modernizing the bomber leg of the U.S. strategic triad? The enthusiasm for détente on the part of Congress and the public was waning as a result of Soviet activities around the world and support was growing for rebuilding America's strategic strength. The Carter Administration had quite different priorities: its goal was not to build weapons but to reduce their number substantially through negotiations with the Soviet Union. By 1979, however, unable to achieve longed-for reductions, and eventually denied the second-best alternative of a SALT II treaty, President Carter finally reached his decision: the B-1 was canceled in favor of the rather leisurely development of the B-2.⁵

Congress has also been of two (or more) minds on how best to modernize the airborne leg. Some Members wanted to immediately produce the B-1 bomber, while others favored waiting for the B-2 (the Reagan Administration decided to do both). While generalizations are dangerous, it's fair to say that many conservative Members of Congress favored immediate improvement through the B-1, and more liberal Members favored the "next system:" the B-2. The same dichotomy has been evident in the debate regarding the MX and the Small ICBM (the latter being the "next system" for the land-based leg of the triad). Regardless of the weapons system currently being debated, the armed services committees have been at the center of the discussions and Congressman Les Aspin has played a pivotal role.

Les Aspin--At the Center of the Storm

The man at the center of the controversy is Congressman Les Aspin (D, Wisconsin), the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC). The HASC, long ruled by seasoned conservatives who marched in step with the

⁴ Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 1971) 7.

⁵ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) 234-5.

Pentagon, in recent years has undergone a power shift that promises to reshape military spending for the future. But Aspin is relatively conservative on defense matters. How did he get to the precarious position he occupies today?

In 1985, the Democratic Caucus, responsible for selecting members and chairmen of committees, deposed the long-time HASC chairman, Melvin Price of Illinois. Mr. Price was old, frail, and conservative--a fatal combination from the point of view of an increasingly activist and youthful Democratic Caucus which wished to retake the initiative stemming from the wildly-successful Reagan defense build-up. Price had been pro-military throughout his 44 years in the House but had increasingly become a figurehead, deferring to Aspin, a former Pentagon "whiz kid" systems analyst and defense intellectual. In selecting the new chairman, the caucus went straight to Aspin, bypassing the second through sixth next-most-senior members.

During his first two years as chairman, however, Aspin caused quite a few of his liberal backers to wonder if his selection had been such a good idea. When, in 1986, he veered from caucus-supported positions on MX and aid to Nicaraguan contras, they deposed him. In January 1987, when the caucus convened to select committee leaders for the 100th Congress, he didn't make the cut. He regained the office a few weeks later but only after publicly proclaiming commitments to hew to the party's increasingly liberal line on defense (and, in the process, issuing quite a number of "IOUs" for which members would expect repayment).⁶ His flexibility is further restricted by the relatively-liberal HASC subcommittee chairs: Ron Dellums of Research and Development; Pat Schroeder of Military Installations and Facilities; and Nick Mavroules of Investigations. Further, beginning in 1987, the Speaker of the House and the Democratic Caucus made it clear that Mr. Aspin did not speak for the House in highly-charged conference issues such as arms control, SDI, MX, and the B-2.⁷

Every year Aspin faces a formidable task. He has to put together a DoD authorization bill for which the majority of House members will vote, which will survive in some form in the inevitable conference with the Senate, and which the president will sign. How he goes about that task--publicly and privately--is the focus of this essay. I'll look at Aspin at work in three arenas, each with its own set of constraining factors:

- *Model I, The Rational Actor:* What does he think is important for U.S. national security? How does he make up his own mind and then defend his position?
- *Model II, The Organizational Process:* What can he get through the fractious and disparate HASC--ranging from Ron Dellums to Bob Dornan? What can he get through the House?
- *Model III, The Bureaucratic Politics Model:* What can he get through the conference with the Senate that the president will sign? What freedom to negotiate will the Democratic Caucus allow?

Let's turn to the first of these models--the rational actor--to examine how Les Aspin makes up his own mind regarding what's best for the country's national security needs.

⁶ Barry M. Blechman, The Politics of National Security, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 38.

⁷ Rowan Scarborough, "House Arms Panel is Leaning to the Left," The Washington Times, 24 Oct 89: 6.

Aspin's Views on National Defense--The Rational Actor Model

"Imagine a chess game in which the observer could see only a screen upon which moves in the game were projected, with no information about how the pieces came to be moved. Initially, most observers would assume--as Model I does--that an individual player was moving the pieces with reference to plans and tactics toward the goal of winning the game."

Graham Allison, Essence of Decision

Allison says that, "Rationality refers to consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints."⁸ In making up his own mind on the B-2, Aspin is a rational actor. He weighs the pros and cons of the system, reaching consistent decisions regarding what's best for national security based on constraints such as the threat, capabilities, alternatives, and costs. This is a complex task and one for which he is admirably suited. Aspin enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a defense intellectual. As an analyst in the Pentagon during the 1960s, he was in on the ground floor of development for many of today's systems. He was elected with the anti-Vietnam War class of 1970 and made a name for himself in the House by issuing frequent press releases criticizing some aspect of defense management. That criticism and his carefully cultivated image as a liberal not withstanding, Aspin is more conservative than the House mainstream on defense matters. He has been the key to maintaining funding for the B-2 and for missiles such as the MX and the Small ICBM. While in past years the House always cut the B-2 more than the Senate (which cut it little, if at all), Aspin was the key to a favorable compromise in the final versions and continuation of the bomber until 1990. In 1990, however, Aspin withdrew his support. What happened to change the opinion of this rational actor?

Aspin made his case on 23 July 1990 in a speech on the House floor in which he outlined three factors: the bomber's cost, capabilities, and mission. Aspin called the \$840 million bomber (reflecting the price at the time) a weapon without a "unique and compelling" mission and said advanced cruise missiles could attack the B-2's intended targets inside the Soviet Union for about ten percent of the bomber's cost. Aspin summarized his position by saying, "It has not been demonstrated that we must build the B-2 now. If we press ahead, we will spend additional tens of billions of dollars before we know if the B-2 will work, and before we know if it is really necessary."⁹ All of this reflects a rational actor at work: attempting to make consistent, value-maximizing choices within specified constraints.

Aspin continued his opposition to the B-2 in 1991. Based on four factors, Aspin decided B-2 production could stop after fifteen aircraft without harming America's defenses:¹⁰

- The August 1991 failed-coup in the Soviet Union. The failure of the conservatives to successfully overthrow Gorbachev convinced Aspin that there is little chance of regression in the democratic revolution in the former Soviet Union. As a result, the threat no longer justifies the expense of the B-2.

⁸ Allison, Essence of Decision, 30.

⁹ Mark Thompson, "Aspin Urges Halting B-2 Bomber Production," Philadelphia Inquirer, 24 Jul 90: 1.

¹⁰ Rowan Scarborough, "Stealth Proponents to Try Different Tack," The Washington Times, 3 Dec 91: 4.

- During a July 1991 test flight, the B-2 failed one of eleven radar signature tests. While it was only one test failure, and one the Air Force claimed could be fixed, too many specters were raised in too many minds: the earlier failure of the B-1 to meet electronic countermeasures requirements, the A-12 fiasco, and a host of other failures of defense programs to meet objectives.
- President Bush's 27 September 1991 arms control proposal cut the legs out from under the Administration's request for the bomber, especially his cancellation of programs for MX and Small ICBM mobility; programs for which Aspin had spilled blood. If Bush could say the threat justified cancellation of programs Aspin had supported, how could Aspin support a program he already thought questionable?
- In a late-summer press conference, General Merrill McPeak, Air Force Chief of Staff, commented that Soviet early-warning radars in all probability could already detect the B-2. While earlier reports concerning French long-wave radars had already emphasized that detecting "something" and being able to target and destroy a B-2 are far different propositions, the Chief's comments were widely used as ammunition to kill the B-2.

By the spring of 1991, the B-2 had too many strikes against it in Aspin's mind. He's shown a tempered backbone in standing up to his more liberal colleagues when he feels a system is in the national interest, but he is not a mindless supporter of the administration's position. He makes up his own mind on national security issues and the precarious nature of his chairmanship reinforces his willingness to take positions that diverge from the administration's.

Thus, a student looking at the process from outside might assume Aspin and the Congress reached a decision to stop production of the B-2 based on a rational process during which they considered what was best for the country (the given payoff function), evaluated fixed alternatives, and based their decision on known outcomes. As Allison suggests, these assumptions are often too heroic to be applied in real life: "For some purposes, governmental behavior can be usefully summarized as action chosen by a unitary, rational decisionmaker: centrally controlled, completely informed, and value maximizing. But this simplification must not be allowed to conceal the fact that a government consists of a conglomerate of semi-feudal, loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own."¹¹ Substitute "Congress" for "government" and "individuals" for "organizations" and it sounds like a good description of the House Armed Services Committee.

Aspin cannot decide positions solely based on what he thinks is good for the nation (decisions he reaches through a rational process). He has to work with "the conglomerate of semi-feudal, loosely allied" individuals in the HASC and the House, where there are other considerations. Aspin's public pronouncements opposing the B-2 purport to reflect the thought processes of a "rational man at work." But the statements disguise some more pragmatic issues: How does he develop a bill for which the HASC will vote and which he can get through the House; all the while maintaining his seat as the chairman of the HASC? Is his opposition to the B-2 solely based on its mission, cost, and

¹¹ Allison, Essence of Decision, 67.

capabilities? Or are there other factors at work? I submit that there are and Model II, the organizational process model, offers some illumination in analyzing these factors.

Aspin and the HASC--The Organizational Process Model

"But a pattern of moves can be imagined that would lead some observers, after watching several games, to consider a model II assumption: the chess player might not be a single individual but rather a loose alliance of semi-independent organizations, each of which moved its set of pieces according to standard operating procedures."

Graham Allison, Essence of Decision

According to Allison, governments define alternatives and estimate consequences as their component organizations process information; governments act as these organizations enact routines. "Government behavior can therefore be understood, according to a second conceptual model, less as deliberate choices and more as *outputs* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behavior."¹² In the case of Aspin and the HASC, those "standard patterns of behavior" involve the ways the HASC makes decisions about where defense money is spent.

I asserted earlier that the DoD authorization bill is only collaterally about defense. More fundamentally, it's about differing priorities for spending. The question often becomes "where the money is spent," not necessarily "on what the money is spent." The Pentagon normally bases decisions on the national interest as it is perceived in that building. The Pentagon's focus is on the "what;" that the money will be spent in someone's district is a second- or third-level input, if it is considered at all. The reverse is often true on the Hill; "where" the money will be spent is often a very important issue. Congress has set procedures for determining "where" money will be spent; procedures that are more important as the defense budget shrinks.

In an era of expansion for defense budgets, or at least before the current retraction, there was enough money to go around. "National" programs (for example, USAF fighter aircraft) peacefully co-existed with "local" programs (for example, local National Guard armories). The future will bring these two into direct competition as the defense budget shrinks an additional 25 % over the next few years (by 1995). Big-ticket items with limited constituency (e.g., Strategic Defense Initiative [SDI] and B-2) have been the "cash cows" that have funded programs for Members in the past. That changed in the FY 92 program. Flushed with "Patriot-ism" (based on the success of that weapon in the gulf), and faced with breakaway republics in the former Soviet Union with nuclear weapons, the HASC did not dramatically cut the President's SDI request, as has been the case in recent years. "On the House side, especially, there has been a key political shift," according to Barry Blechman. "Many of the centrist Democrats have concluded that the politics of opposing missile defenses are not good: It's hard to explain to people why they shouldn't be protected."¹³ And a number of liberal congressmen, surprisingly, supported the move. It's surprising, that is, until you consider that the only place left to find money for member concerns was the B-2, a system many liberal

¹² Allison, Essence of Decision, 67.

¹³ Melissa Healy, " 'Star Wars' Program Blooms as Cold War Fades," Los Angeles Times, 24 Nov 91: 30.

Congressmen view as more threatening than SDI. Thus, money had to be cut from the B-2 to fund priorities for Members and to protect Aspin's seat. According to Aerospace Daily,

... Aspin may be able to sell moderate and liberal Democrats on a watered down version of the Senate proposal authorizing a ballistic missile defense against limited strikes to produce a majority in the House for the plan, congressional sources said [on 29 Aug 91]. ... The source said Aspin could conceivably put together a coalition of hawkish Democrats and Republicans to command a majority in the House for his plan, but the source noted that ever since Aspin's chairmanship was endangered by the House Democratic Caucus in 1987 Aspin has tailored the House defense authorization to command a majority of Democratic support by cutting strategic weapons and keeping existing production lines open against the wishes of the Defense Department.¹⁴

The process of "cutting ... weapons and keeping ... production lines open" is similar in both houses of Congress.

In The Politics of National Security, Barry Blechman describes the Senate process, which is largely accomplished by the SASC staff. During mark-up, the SASC staff prepares a proposed version of the DoD authorization bill. How does the staff decide what to include in each subcommittee package? Members interests are,

... the overriding concern, most importantly members of the relevant subcommittee, then other [SASC] members, and then other senators, with some--such as members of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee--being more equal than others. ... For the most part, senators' initiatives were intended to protect, or to add to, constituents' special interests ("pork" in the vernacular). They each tended to involve relatively small amounts of money (that add up to large sums).¹⁵

As I said earlier, the process in the House, supervised by Les Aspin, is similar. An article in the National Journal provides a revealing look at the way the HASC and its staff operate:

The big-picture guy, sitting astride that crucial Washington nexus where high policy meets parochial politics, is [HASC] committee counselor Larry K. Smith. Among other innovations, Smith runs Aspin's "Member services" team This "is an effort to work with Members to help them understand all of the individual elements that go into the defense budget," [staff director Rudy F.] de Leon explained, "and to help them work with items that are important to their constituencies."¹⁶

The latter part of this mission is the key to Aspin's ability to get a bill through the HASC and through the full House. Financing items important to lawmakers' constituents often means altering Pentagon priorities and continuing projects the Pentagon doesn't want--increased reserve and National Guard rosters and seemingly unstoppable aircraft production lines such as the F-14 and C-130--but ones that perpetuate jobs, and, thus, votes, back home. The Wall Street Journal described Smith's contribution to Aspin's efforts to put together an acceptable bill as, "His job is to keep the chairman informed of the Members' wish lists, which Mr. Aspin then dutifully tries to meet to keep his troops happy."¹⁷ Continuing in the National Journal,

¹⁴ "Aspin Faces Tough Sell on Limited Strike Missile Defense," Aerospace Daily, 30 Aug 91: 343.

¹⁵ Barry M. Blechman, The Politics of National Security, 47.

¹⁶ David C. Morrison, "Retooling a Staff," National Journal, 15 Jun 91: 1408.

¹⁷ "General Aspin's Pork Army," The Wall Street Journal, 21 May 91: 22.

That's a "politically motivated and disappointed editorialist" talking, Smith retorted [referring to the Wall Street Journal editorial]. "If you're going to have a policy-driven bill, you need to have enough Members to pass it. So you need to build a team who will rally around a set of policies." Undeniably, one Member's pork may be another's policy. The choices made by the [House] Armed Services Committee and endorsed by the full House can and have been justified on policy grounds: maintaining the "defense industrial base," for example, and sustaining a strong "Total Force" of more costly active and cheaper reserve troops. Just as undeniably, however, Aspin has harnessed the force of politics in a way not seen on this panel for a long time.¹⁸

The National Journal article illustrates the competition and ultimate contradiction between the rational model and the organizational model. In the rational model, a single payoff function exists (in the case of this essay: "What's best for national security?"). In the organizational process, the standard pattern of behavior (in this essay: the Member services team) introduces another payoff function that complicates the decisionmaking process. That doesn't mean individuals won't revert to the "rational actor" model to explain their decision. As evidence for this, consider my assertion that the issue in the FY 92 DoD Authorization Bill was not about saving money. The 1990 budget agreement "fenced" money for defense in FY 92 at \$291 billion. All cries of "The B-2 is too expensive!" and "There are cheaper alternatives!" fail to take into account the fact that all four versions of the DoD bill for FY 92--the President's Budget request, the HASC/House version, the SASC/Senate version, and the House-Senate conference version--had the same amount of money: \$291 billion. Money wasn't saved; it was just moved around, and not to cheaper methods of carrying out proposed missions for the B-2. The issue in FY 92--a lean year for defense--was finding money for Members' interests. The money had to come from somewhere and in the HASC version of the FY 92 bill, it came from the B-2 because, as a "national" program, the B-2 has little constituency. But that's not because Northrop hasn't tried.

Northrop has done its best to make the B-2 a "local program." Every state but Alaska and Hawaii has contracts for B-2 work. For 1987-91, B-2 work is worth \$1.77 billion for California, \$791 million for Texas, \$511 million for New York, and even \$24 million for Les Aspin's home state of Wisconsin. The district of Congressman Norm Dicks of Washington--the B-2's strongest supporter on the HASC--contains Boeing, the largest B-2 subcontractor with \$3.4 billion worth of B-2 money (87-91).¹⁹ But Northrop's effort has had only limited success. We can expect B-2 proponents in the future to use the "jobs" and "waste" issues. According to congressional sources quoted in The Washington Times, "Because arguments on grounds of national security and stealth technology failed this year, B-2 proponents will argue that it would be a huge waste of tax money to end the program at 15 planes."²⁰

Some Air Force and congressional officials estimate it will take \$40 billion to finish the fifteenth aircraft, buy spares, and pay the steep termination costs owed Northrop if the program is canceled.²¹ Congressional B-2 supporters will also push more forcefully the issue of jobs in a depressed economy. Northrop estimates more than 40,000 people

¹⁸ David C. Morrison, "Retooling a Staff," National Journal, 15 Jun 91: 1408.

¹⁹ "U.S. Weapons Makers Intensify Lobbying Efforts as Budgets Fall," New York Times, 6 Aug 91: 1.

²⁰ Rowan Scarborough, "Stealth Proponents to Try Different Tack," The Washington Times, 3 Dec 91: 4.

²¹ Scarborough, The Washington Times, 3 Dec 91: 4.

work on the B-2 in some capacity at aerospace companies across the country. But 40,000 B-2 workers are a much smaller constituency than the number Aspin and other Members can support using the B-2 money for other purposes. According to the Wall Street Journal,

Stealing from SDI and the B-2 means ... Aspin has more money to buy votes [in 1991]. ... The Ohio and Michigan delegations won \$270 million for 60 more M-1 tanks. ... Pennsylvania Republican Curt Weldon happily sold his vote for more money for the V-22 Osprey, which the Pentagon has tried to kill for three straight years. ... Richard Ray, a Georgia Democrat, backed Mr. Aspin after he squeezed projects worth \$4.2 million for Robins Air Force Base in his district. Virginia Democrat Norman Sisisky went along with the chairman after Fort Lee, in his Virginia district, lined up for \$11.3 million for a finance office and a training facility the Pentagon didn't want.²²

Aspin convinced Congressman Montgomery to vote against the B-2 by adding \$300 million for national guard armories in 100 districts for which the Secretary of Defense had not requested funds.²³ That move alone offset the 40,000 B-2 workers by retaining nearly 40,000 more reserve slots than DoD requested. The motivation to vote with Aspin has not always been positive, however. Aspin is willing to use horsepower when things don't go his way:

... Aspin was typically tough and self-assured in lining up support against [the B-2]. Rep. Albert Bustamante (D-Tex.) can testify to that. Bustamante informed Aspin that he felt he just had to vote for the B-2 and noted that the chairman had votes to spare against it on the procurement subcommittee [which Aspin chairs]. Bustamante [said] Aspin immediately threatened retaliation. Aspin was good to his word when Bustamante voted his conscience on the subcommittee. The chairman killed Bustamante's effort to include six C-26 transport planes [in the DoD authorization bill], manufactured in his home district of San Antonio, at a cost of \$20 million. [When asked why he killed the effort] Aspin [said] the C-26 package was "the worst pork in the business" and that he would not put it in the bill "for that reason." But last year, when Bustamante pushed a similar amendment for the defense bill, Aspin supported him.²⁴

According to Defense Week, "Bustamante's fate was typical of the political leverage Aspin applies against non-compliant members through a low-profile organization informally dubbed the member services team ..."²⁵

Aspin, the "rational man," uses the decline of the Soviet Union and the military threat posed by the Warsaw Pact to provide the underpinning for his logic supporting the move of money from nuclear-armed weapons to conventional arms. But there is another factor at work. Aspin, the "organizational man," has to get a bill through the HASC and full House. According to Congressional Quarterly,

... there is also a political logic to the money shift: Aspin can give the committee members an incentive to back him on the B-2 by parceling out to projects they favor the \$3.2 billion [in the Administration's request]. He used the tactic last year with great success. "Santa Claus couldn't keep up with him as he doles out his goodies," complained a frustrated B-2 proponent.²⁶

²² "General Aspin's Pork Army," The Wall Street Journal, 21 May 91: 22.

²³ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Bombed on Capitol Hill," The Washington Post, 24 May 91: 23.

²⁴ Evans and Novak, The Washington Post, 24 May 91: 23.

²⁵ Tony Capaccio, "Aspin Muscles B-2 Supporter to Keep the Troops in Line," Defense Week, 13 May 91: 1.

²⁶ Pat Towell, "B-2 Supporters Invigorated by Stealth Success in Gulf," Congressional Quarterly, 4 May 91: 1139.

Aspin used the money from the B-2 account for purposes more attractive to Members. His strategy was clear: "It's not going to be a vote for the B-2," said Congressman Kasich. "It's going to be a vote against something else."²⁷

None of the foregoing is designed to denigrate Aspin's considerable expertise in national security affairs or politics. It reinforces his reputation in the latter arena, in fact. The discussion is designed to illustrate Model II's description of government action as organizational output, partially coordinated by a unified group of leaders. It also balances Model I's effort to describe the activity as the choice of a unitary decisionmaker with a single payoff function. But I would like to look at another level.

As Allison suggests, "The 'leaders' who sit on top of organizations are not a monolithic group. Rather, each individual ... is, in his own right, a player in a central, competitive game. The name of the game is politics ..."²⁸ Once he has a bill through the House, Aspin has to reconcile his version with that of the Senate in "a central, competitive game" known as the House-Senate conference. Model III--the Bureaucratic Politics Model--is useful in analyzing the negotiations regarding the fate of the B-2.

Aspin and the House-Senate Conference--The Bureaucratic Politics Model

"It is conceivable, furthermore, that the pattern of play might suggest to an observer a Model III assumption: a number of distinct players, with distinct objectives but shared power over the pieces, could be determining the moves as the resultant of collegial bargaining."

Graham Allison, Essence of Decision

In contrast to the rational actor model, the bureaucratic politics model has no single actor; it has many actors: actors who focus not on a single value-maximization function but on many diverse problems and issues; actors who act not in terms of a consistent set of strategic objectives but according to various conceptions of national, organizational, and personal goals; actors who make decisions not through a single, rational choice but through the struggle we call politics.²⁹ This is evident in the third arena in which Aspin must operate: the House-Senate conference on the DoD authorization bill.

In 1985, Congress ended a divisive battle over the future of the MX with a long-term deal between the anti-MX House and the pro-MX Senate. In 1991, many observers expected a similar compromise over the B-2. In May 1991, however, there was no sign of an agreement and no certainty that a House-Senate deal was in the cards. According to Congressional Quarterly,

"At some point, we need to get both sides together to see whether we can't figure out a number," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin, D-Wis., told reporters May 22 [1991]. But he refused to tip his hand. "I've got no bottom line," he insisted. "My negotiating position is

²⁷ Pat Towell, Congressional Quarterly, 4 May 91: 1139.

²⁸ Allison, Essence of Decision, 144.

²⁹ Allison, Essence of Decision, 144.

that we should build no more than 15." Moreover, Aspin said, the time might not be ripe to end the B-2 battle in 1991. "Politically, there's a time when people are tired of fighting, and they want to cut a deal," he said. "I can't tell if that's the case yet."³⁰

For several years, the B-2 has headed the list of Administration priorities. The price for President Reagan's and President Bush's signatures has always been substantial funding for both the B-2 and SDI. During the bargaining, Senator Nunn has always had an ace in the hole: if the Senate position on those two systems was not adopted, or at least a reasonable compromise reached, then the president would veto the defense bill. In one recent year, Nunn even convinced the full Senate to override the SASC version of the bill and add money for SDI, all for the expressed purpose of taking a stronger position into the conference with the House. The result after the Senate action was typical--the conference split the difference between the House version and the Senate version. Other systems could rise and fall in the negotiations with the House--with some Senate positions adopted in toto; and some House positions adopted--but the B-2 and SDI had the full backing of the president and normally were protected.

Heading into the House-Senate conference on the FY 92 authorization bill, the House had voted to stop production after the fifteenth aircraft while the Senate had adopted the Administration's request to produce four more aircraft. Normally, the difference has been halved in conference during the past few years. Why did the conference adopt the House's position this year instead of splitting the difference and producing two? The primary reason is that even a skilled negotiator needs to bargain from strength and Senator Nunn no longer had his ace in the hole--the Administration's support was weakening.

According to Aviation Week and Space Technology, General Colin L. Powell, the JCS chairman, recommended a cap at 48 B-2s be included in the president's 27 September 1991 arms control proposal. The magazine reported that the chairman opposes full spending on the B-2 because he feels it threatens the survival of other modernization programs.³¹ He was overruled in September but others in the Administration share his skepticism.

Dick Cheney, the Secretary of Defense, has also been lukewarm in support of the B-2 ever since the failed test in July. He and his advisors were burned on the A-12 by the Navy (Secretary Cheney came out strongly in support of the A-12 during the 1990 Major Aircraft Review and then had to backtrack when the program was revealed to be "overcost" and behind schedule; he ultimately canceled the program). He and his advisers are determined to avoid a similar circumstance with the B-2. Trying to put the best possible face on the situation, Secretary of the Air Force Donald B. Rice, the Administration's strongest B-2 proponent, explained the Secretary of Defense's failure to support the B-2 during the fall B-2 battles by saying Cheney was too busy analyzing options regarding Iraq and its failure to comply with U.N. inspection demands dealing with its nuclear program. Cheney actually had the A-12 on his mind.³²

³⁰ Pat Towell, "Bargaining for B-2 Bombers," Congressional Quarterly, 25 May 91: 1383.

³¹ Aviation Week and Space Technology, 24 Oct 91: 24.

³² Scarborough, The Washington Times, 3 Dec 91: 4.

Even the president has been silent--another sign of the rapidly disappearing support for the B-2. During public pronouncements on the various conference positions, he mentioned that cutting SDI too deeply would be grounds for a veto but significantly did not mention the House's deep B-2 cut. President Bush and Secretary Cheney are now quietly putting missile defense against "accidental" or Third World launch ahead of the stealthy bomber in terms of what the United States must have.³³ There won't be enough money for both systems and the swift decline of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact weighs against the B-2. The same feeling is held by some important members of the SASC. "The merits of the program have been lost long ago in the frenzy of defense budget cutting," said Senator John McCain (R, Arizona) as early as 1990. "I'm very skeptical about its future as a program at all." In the same year, Senator Trent Lott (R, Mississippi) said, "I have to tell you, I have to take a look at [the B-2]. The world climate is different. The cost is astronomical. I just have to ask myself, do we have to have the B-2?"³⁴

Senator Nunn has been a strong supporter of the B-2 but even he had growing doubts before the 1991 conference: "I do not think the strategic role of the B-2 is as vivid as it was."³⁵ He knew from the public pronouncements from the Administration where their priorities lay. And so did Aspin. The lack of support from President Bush, Secretary Cheney, and General Powell weakened the bargaining position of Senator Sam Nunn, the lone remaining B-2 supporter in a position to do something about it. This year, the failed coup in the Soviet Union, the president's September arms control proposal, and the lack of support from the Administration further undercut the Senate's bargaining position, which was not very strong to begin with (at 51-48, the B-2 got one less vote than then-Judge Clarence Thomas in the Senate).³⁶ As a result, Senator Nunn had little with which to bargain.

When he signed the \$291 billion DoD Authorization Bill into law on 6 December--a bill which constrained future production of the B-2,

... the president said the bill provides for a defense "sufficient to meet foreseeable threats to the national security" and generally supports his defense priorities. ... Bush said he was particularly pleased by the SDI provisions of the bill, which include \$4.15 billion in research and development money and for the first time set a target date for deploying a defense against long-range ballistic missiles. Bush made no mention of the bill's denial of his request for \$3.2 billion to buy four new B-2 bombers, which he earlier had said was one of his highest military priorities.³⁷

Men and women share political power. They differ about what must be done and fight for their choices in the arena we call politics. In fighting for their choices, the chess pieces are not moved by a rational actor defending his course of action, or even by the standard behavior patterns of the organizations involved, but by the power and skill of the fighters for and against the action in question.

³³ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Bye-Bye B-2," The Washington Post, 23 Oct 91: 27.

³⁴ Melissa Healy and Paul Houston, "B-2 Bomber a Visible Target for Budget Ax," Los Angeles Times, 18 Mar 90: 1.

³⁵ Evans and Novak, The Washington Post, 23 Oct 91: 27.

³⁶ Eric Schmitt, "Lawmakers Deal a Crippling Blow to the B-2 Bomber," New York Times, 1 Nov 91: 1.

³⁷ "Defense Bill Signed by Bush sets 1996 as Target for SDI Deployment," The Washington Post, 7 Dec 91: A8.

But before those in the strategic Air Force begin to bemoan the fate of the B-2, we need to ask, "Just what did the FY 92 bill do to the B-2?" The President's Budget requested \$4.7 billion for the B-2 and authorization to build four more aircraft (numbers 16 through 19). The final bill authorized nearly \$4.3 billion; not too far different from the president's request. The bill also authorized money for a sixteenth bomber but said the sixteenth aircraft could not be built without approval from both the Senate and the House (thereby almost certainly ensuring the issue will have to be readdressed because of the large House majority opposing the B-2). The bill also authorized \$1.8 billion for production of long-lead items for bombers number 17 through number 26. While the rhetoric from the House is that "The B-2 is dead," you can't tell it from the FY 92 DoD Authorization Act. The issue will be readdressed next year. The House and the Democratic Caucus may have gained a moral victory but Congress is still listening to the Members who represent 40,000 B-2 workers and the 48 states with B-2 contracts.

Conclusion

According to Allison, "To explain why a particular formal governmental decision was made, or why one pattern of governmental behavior emerged, it is necessary to identify the games and players, to display the coalitions, bargains, and compromises, and to convey some feel for the confusion."³⁸ That advice and his three models offer illumination in the case of the semi-decision on the B-2 during the FY 92 DoD Authorization Bill.

Looking through the lenses of Model I--the rational actor--we can analyze the process Aspin used to reach his own conclusions about the need for the B-2. Based on changes in the threat, testing problems, and the availability of cheaper alternatives, Aspin rationally decided to cast his personal vote against the B-2. Those same reasons were also of great value in explaining his position. But that explanation and the lenses of Model I don't show the second level of detail. As a result of the budget agreement, which specifies the amount to be spent on defense in FY 92, saving money was not the issue on the B-2--the House spent every cent they "saved" on the B-2 on some other defense-related program. Model I disguises the standard behavior patterns which the HASC employs to allocate defense money. To see the impact of those standard behaviors, we need to turn to Model II.

Model II--the organizational process--provides a handy framework for analyzing the set procedures used by both the House and Senate in satisfying Members' parochial desires. The B-2 had to be cut, not only for the announced reasons, but also because Aspin needed money from that account to ensure the "Member services" unit could fulfill desires such as money for Guard and Reserve units, V-22 research and production, and M-1 tank production. Aspin has to develop a bill the majority of Members will vote for, and as Congressman Kasich eloquently put the case, Aspin made a vote *for* the B-2 a vote *against* things closer to Congressional hearts. But Model II also leaves us with an incomplete understanding. The House makes parochial decisions (the Senate does, too) but why didn't the Senate prevail on the B-2 in 1991 as has been the case in the past? To answer that question, we need to turn to Model III.

³⁸ Allison, Essence of Decision, 146.

Through the lenses of Model III--the bureaucratic process--we can see that "policy" on the B-2 is made as a result of negotiations between the House and Senate in the conference to reconcile the different versions of the authorization bill. While the Senate had the votes for the B-2 in their version, the narrowness of the margin and the lack of support from the Administration made the ultimate decision on the B-2 unsurprising. Nunn could fully protect only the Administration's highest strategic priority--SDI--in conference this year.³⁹ But he was still able to get \$4.3 billion of the \$4.7 billion requested. Aspin "won" only in that the act precludes a sixteenth aircraft without House approval.

In conclusion, I need to make sure an important point is not lost in this academic exercise. For purposes of clarity, I separated three related activities and used three models to analyze the process (Aspin making up his own mind *rationality*; accommodating the desires of House Members with set *organizational routines*; and bargaining in the process of *bureaucratic politics* called the House-Senate conference). But elements of all three models are present in all three arenas. You have to use all three models to gain a complete understanding of the national security process. When Aspin works issues with the "Member services team," he not only uses a set routine--Model II: HASC counsel Smith keeping track of who wants what--he bargains (Model III) with Members using rational support (Model I) for his position as well as positive and negative inducements to vote his way (again Models II and III). Senator Nunn reinforces his arguments in conference (bargaining, Model III) with rational support (Model I) for weapons systems; rational support he knows Aspin, a professional, will consider.

Rather than considering the three models in isolation, consider the process as an onion to be peeled with each model another layer of the onion. On the surface, the process appears clear: the B-2 was "killed" because of rational reasons based on its merits. But why did we spend half the total money for the program, to produce only fifteen airplanes, before Congress made a semi-decision? You need to peel another layer: the B-2 was affected in 1991 because the FY 92 defense budget is shrinking, bringing "national" programs into direct conflict with "local" programs. Why wasn't the Senate fully successful in conference? Peel another layer: because bargaining requires strength--Senator Nunn was bluffing on the B-2 and Aspin knew it. And even then, Nunn got about what he wanted: he protected SDI *and* the B-2.

The academic treatment of the process in this essay is similar to debating the merits of a beautiful woman. One can admire her eyes, her smile, her personality, her intelligence ... and say she is beautiful because of one of many attributes. But that misses the point: it is the composite woman who matters. Similarly, each of Allison's models have been treated separately because each contributes another level to our understanding of how the process works. But you need the whole package to fully understand the case of Congress and the B-2: a triumph of politics.

³⁹ One wonders, however, as the budget agreement reduces money for DoD next year (or if the budget agreement is reopened as Senator Byrd called for on 13 December 1991), whether the votes will be there for SDI deployment. Or will the House just use it as the "next system" for which they can vote in order to prove they are tough on defense while they try again to kill the B-2?

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